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EXCLUSIVE

GREGG DOYEL

Doyel: Tuesday was a breaking point for Stephanie White and, perhaps, turning point for WNBA

Gregg Doyel
Indianapolis Star

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Key Points

- Stephanie White blasts online trolls plaguing WNBA's Indiana Fever – and gets support from troll favorites Caitlin Clark and Sophie Cunningham.
- White used her pregame news conference to blast "the fearmongering, the divisiveness, the stuff that's trying to hijack our league."
- After another Fever win, Clark and Cunningham said they fully supported their coach, said the locker room is tight, and decried the way White had been booed at Gainbridge Fieldhouse before the game.

INDIANAPOLIS — Everyone has a breaking point, and let the record show: Indiana Fever coach Stephanie White reached hers Tuesday night at 6:33 p.m., about an hour before the Fever played the visiting New York Liberty.

And let the record show:

When Stephanie White decried "the fearmongering, the divisiveness, the stuff that's trying to hijack our league," she was correct.

Was she correct in everything she said? Oh, maybe not everything. Her last six words – *Everybody else can go to hell* – didn't help the 300 that came first, when among other things she had said: "I will always lead with love, I will always lead with grace, I will always lead with humility."

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And when she had said: "When they go low, we go high. Love will win. Grace will win. Humility will win, and kindness will win."

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But let's show Stephanie White something that has been lacking, something that has been damn near exterminated, during this 2026 WNBA season. Let's show her grace.

Because it's been a lot. This week, the last month, this season – the 1½ years of her second go-around as coach of the Indiana Fever. It's been a lot for White.

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Look, it's been a lot for everyone: for fans, for players around the league, for players on the Fever. It's been a lot for Caitlin Clark, for Sophie Cunningham, for Alyssa Thomas, for WNBA commissioner Cathy Engelbert.

It's been a lot for local and national media, if you want to know the truth. There are people who don't enjoy covering this season, this team – this league – because it's like I said in those first five words:

Everybody has a breaking point.

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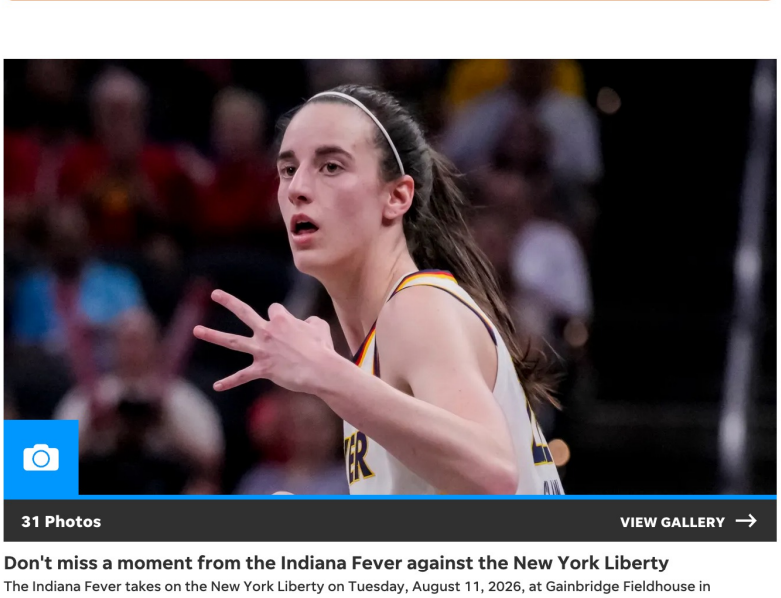

Don't miss a moment from the Indiana Fever against the New York Liberty

The Indiana Fever takes on the New York Liberty on Tuesday, August 11, 2026, at Gainbridge Fieldhouse in Indianapolis.

Well, everybody but the WNBA trolls. If the WNBA trolls have a breaking point, we've not seen it yet. They are inexhaustible, insatiable. Generally this is the point of a column where I'd remind you that Twitter or X – whatever we're calling it – is not a real place, which suggests the people, the trolls on Elon Musk's cesspool, aren't real either.

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But they are real, and this week offered indisputable truth, because one of the trolls – a troll calling for the Fever to fire Stephanie White – has a name we know:

Indiana Lt. Gov. Micah Beckwith.

Aug. 11, 2026 – Regular Season

Liberty (20-14)	92	Final	106	Fever (21-12)	
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Full Play-by-play

Yeah, it's been a lot. And everyone has a breaking point.

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News: Fever coach Stephanie White impassioned statement on 'narratives' around her team

Related: Indiana Lt. Gov. Micah Beckwith says Fever should fire coach Stephanie White

Some Caitlin Clark 'fans' are ruining WNBA for rest of us

On social media, trolls have been trying to fire Stephanie White all season, generally for this reason:

She's not the right coach for Caitlin!

Caitlin Clark has been a transcendent player in the WNBA, arguably the most important player in league history, but one particular aspect of her effect on the league – the trauma some of her fans have inflicted on the game – has been the single worst thing that has ever happened to the WNBA. Her fans or worshippers or whatever we're calling them, they've ruined the party the WNBA should be throwing right now. The league has never had more eyeballs on it, in person and on TV, and players have never made more money, and yes, Caitlin Clark has played a starring role in the WNBA's breakthrough.

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Clark is transcendent, as I said – is that nice enough, trolls? – and she attracted countless new fans to women's basketball when she was at Iowa. Many of those folks followed her into the WNBA, in some cases literally, by driving regularly from Iowa to Indianapolis to watch her play in person. They're not the problem.

Who is? The trolls, the hard-right influencers, the bullies from Barstool, the lieutenant governor of Indiana – those are the problem people. Outsiders, I'm calling them.

And since Stephanie White returned to the Fever before the 2025 WNBA season, outsiders have been calling for her job. Why? Because Caitlin Clark isn't leading the WNBA in scoring or averaging a triple-double, I guess, but please don't ask me to think like a troll or Barstool bully or lieutenant governor of Indiana. It's exhausting enough trying to keep track of the actual events happening this season around this team, and this league, which often feels like the same thing:

Alyssa Thomas' fist to Clark's neck earlier this season, and the racist attacks on Thomas it triggered. Sophie Cunningham's interview with ESPN – her comments on trans women in sports – and the ugliness that triggered: Protests from fans, an incident involving a Seattle Storm minority-owner co-owner and a fan wearing a T-shirt, demands for Caitlin Clark to say something about the issue, then the attacks on Clark (*coward!*) for not saying what the trolls wanted her to say.

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As Sophie Cunningham's emergence shows – remember the way she theatrically pointed at DeWanna Bonner? – not every viral WNBA moment this season, not even every viral moment with the Fever, has involved Caitlin Clark. But it can seem that way. There was Clark's argument on the Fever bench with assistant Briann January. There was the time White kicked Clark out of the team huddle.

It's a lot, as I keep saying.

Then came DiJonai Carrington's flagrant foul on Cunningham on Saturday in Chicago – Carrington clotheslined her – and Carrington's post on social media that used the phrase white privilege.

After the foul, after the game, after Carrington's post on Threads, White tried to talk about the foul without completely thrashing the character of Carrington, who had played for White in 2023 and '24 at Connecticut.

"One of the things about (Carrington) is that she's gonna play her butt off, man," White had said after the game. "She's going to compete and nobody's gonna go walking in for a layup. I don't oppose the hard foul, but I also don't think that she intentionally went for the neck."

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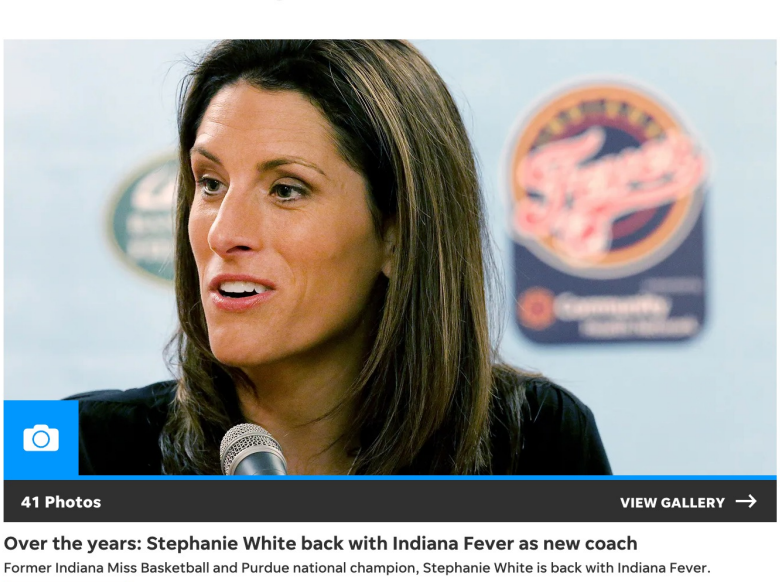
Then the trolls got ahold of her quote, including the president of Barstool Sports, Dave Portnoy, who personifies the hard right's unwanted adoption of Clark as their avatar. Portnoy wrote: "Stephanie White has to go. You're the head coach, defend your players or get lost."

Another troll on Twitter, who goes by the name **#FireStephWhite**, posted a video of White's news conference with the words: "Steph is defending (Carrington) because she taught her and AT (Alyssa Thomas) to do this."

Trolls are gonna troll. And the troll's name is #FireStephWhite? Easy to dismiss someone on Twitter who goes by #FireStephWhite.

Little bit harder to dismiss someone on Twitter who goes by **TheMicahBeckwith**.

You know: The lieutenant governor of Indiana.



Over the years: Stephanie White back with Indiana Fever as new coach

Former Indiana Miss Basketball and Purdue national champion, Stephanie White is back with Indiana Fever.

Micah Beckwith rips Stephanie White

Beckwith, a populist pastor-politician with a genius for knowing what his followers want – and the crassness to give it to them – went on Twitter early Sunday morning to share that post from **#FireStephWhite**. But he didn't leave it there. He posted a comment above the tweet:

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"Ok… The @IndianaFever need to let Stephanie White go. No solid coach would ever take the side of the opposing team's player who committed a flagrant foul on one of your own players. Terrible coaching!

"The Fever need to defend their players."

To recap:

The lieutenant governor of Indiana went on Twitter to call for the firing of the coach of Indiana's WNBA franchise. And this isn't any coach. This is Stephanie White:

IndyStar Miss Basketball at Seeger High in 1995, national player of the year and national champion at Purdue in 1999, popular Fever player from 2000-04, Fever head coach in 2015 and '16, and again since 2025.

The @IndianaFever need to let Stephanie White go…

Was that the breaking point for Stephanie White, Beckwith's tweet Sunday at 6:32 a.m.? Can't say. She didn't call out Beckwith (or Portnoy) by name, but later Tuesday she said she'd been reacting to "the response from Saturday."

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So this is what happened Tuesday at 6:33 p.m., during her first media appearance since the weekend:

White walks into the press conference room, sits down, and starts talking.

"This isn't for people in this room," she says. "This is for an online community trying to create narratives that simply don't exist. Trying to create a distortion of who I am, what I'm about. Our player success, our player health and wellness, our players' safety is always a top priority. One of the things I pride myself on is my relationship with my players.

"Those who have anything to say about the (Carrington) play in the last game, I didn't see it in real time. I went straight to the press conference. I thought the play got called right. Thankfully Sophie is OK. Was (the foul) egregious? Absolutely. When you have a chance to watch that over and over on replay, you can see that. I didn't have that chance.

"I take personally any suggestion that I don't 100% always have my players back. I ride with them, 10 toes down, all the time. *All* the time. They know that. It's a shame that we can't have an opportunity to talk about what great basketball they're playing, because they are (expletive) *playing*.

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"The reality is, with me, I will always lead with love, I will always lead with grace, I will always lead with humility. And I will always lead with integrity. It doesn't mean I'll always get it right. I'm also human. I hate the fearmongering, the divisiveness, the stuff that's trying to hijack our league *will not win*."

Here, White pounds the table as she emphasizes those last three words.

"It won't win," she continues. "We are united, we are connected, we will not be divided. Every day these women put their ass on the line. Every day. When they go low, we go high. Love will win. Grace will win. Humility will win, and kindness will win. I stand by them. I will always stand by them.

"Everybody else can go to hell."

She rises and walks out of the room.

About the game: Fever blowout Liberty behind Kelsey Mitchell, Caitlin Clark

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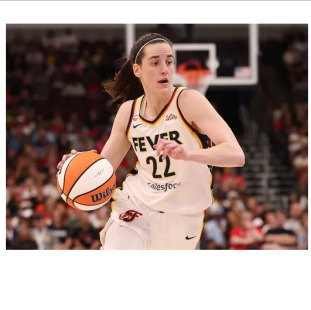
IN DEPTH

The latest on Stephanie White, Indiana Fever



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Stephanie White booed, Caitlin Clark reacts

An hour later, pregame introductions. The building is packed, because the Fever have won eight of 11 games to surge into a tie for first in the Eastern Conference at 20-12, and because superstar Caitlin Clark is on the team and because reserve guard Sophie Cunningham is on the team.

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Is the building packed because WNBA All-Stars Aliyah Boston and Kelsey Mitchell are on the team, too? You'd hope so, but it's hard to say. Everywhere you look are fans wearing Clark's No. 22 jersey, or Cunningham's No. 8 jersey. Didn't see many wearing No. 0 (Mitchell) or No. 7 (Boston).

Pregame introductions. Cheers for the players, loudest for Clark. Then Stephanie White is introduced. The sound is … strange. It doesn't sound like boos, not exactly, but it's definitely not supportive. It's a mix, the angry canceling out the happy, the overall tone flat, deep.

This is the fan reaction to Stephanie White.

The franchise's reaction? It's different – better. First, within minutes of White's news conference, the team texts a statement from Fever president Kelly Krauskopf to beat reporters at 6:56 p.m. that reads:

"Coach White has done a tremendous job leading the Fever and for the second-consecutive season, has us in great position for a playoff push. She has kept our team focused and united, all while under the brightest spotlight our team and our league have ever experienced. She has the full support of leadership."

Then, 25 minutes later – 7:19 p.m. – the official Fever account on Twitter posts the entire video of White's emotional statement to its 283,000 followers. They're not hiding from what she said. They're promoting it.

After the game, after the Fever blasted the Liberty 106-92, the Fever announced a change to their original plan of bringing Mitchell and Boston into the postgame interview room. Instead, they're bringing in Cunningham and Clark, a show of force, of team unity, made clear when Cunningham said "our locker room in there is tight" and added, "Me and Stephanie are great. It's really the outside noise that's trying to distract us, but we're good."

Clark made it even more clear, blasting the trolls on social media – she didn't name Beckwith or Portnoy, but they know who they are – and loving on her coach.

"I talked to Steph earlier in the day," Clark said, "and I think we forget a lot of times we're human too, and she has feelings, and there's moments that are really hard. Sometimes that's the job you sign up for, but at the same time it's OK to feel those emotions. And I told her: I've been through the same thing. There's been days where I've been really upset, and you can have the thickest skin in the world, but sometimes it does get to you.

"But I think our world is just: We love to hate. We love to divide. That's all we want to do. Nobody wants to see each other succeed. That's a really painful thing for myself to watch. … I can assure you, there was no way we were losing this game tonight, and I told her that before the game."

Clark continued.

"That's my head coach," she said. "I hated that our fans booed her before the game. That made me a little sick, to be honest.

"I get it, it's professional sports, people are going to boo. But at the end of the day that's our head coach and we're going to ride for her and we're always going to have her back. That's never going to tear our locker room apart. I just love her and I feel for her."

When it was over, another fascinating, exhausting day for the WNBA's most fascinating, exhausting franchise, this much was clear:

The Fever 100% has its coach's back. The franchise is riding with her, 10 toes down. But on social media where the trolls breed, and even inside the building where the Fever played Tuesday night, the reaction was different, uglier – a little sick, to be honest. The world, real and otherwise, is a sad place.

More: Join the text conversation with sports columnist Gregg Doyel for insights, reader questions and Doyel's peeks behind the curtain.

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